

Selection 4—Subject: Social Studies  
Theme: What America Means—Traditions and Symbols

## THE WHITE HOUSE

### ABOUT THE PASSAGE

FOR RENT: 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue: Residence/office complex, 18th century design, more than 100 rooms, 20 baths, gym, private theater. Excellent for entertaining. Set in 18-acre landscaped park with pool and tennis court. Four-year lease available. Apply to the American voters.

### REASON FOR READING

To find out more about our president's home and to see how much it has changed over the years.

### READ THE PASSAGE\*

Situated in the center of our nation's capital, the presidential mansion is a combination residence, office building, and museum. First known as the President's House, then as the Executive Mansion, the white-painted building was often called the White House. When Theodore Roosevelt had his stationery engraved "The White House," the name became the building's official name.

When its first occupants, President and Mrs. John Adams, moved into the White House in November 1800, the Virginia sandstone building was not quite finished. In fact, it stood in a sea of mud dotted with workmen's shacks and tools. While President Adams was busy with the work of the nation, his wife set about making the place habitable and coping with difficult circumstances—such as having to hang the family laundry to dry in the unfinished East Room.

Since these unglamorous beginnings, presidential families have lived there, entertained there, and been on public display there. Each occupant has left an imprint on this temporary home that has become part of the nation's heritage. It might be new wallpaper in a reception room or a rocking chair in an office. It could be simply the memory or the effects of a particular mood that was created while the president was there.

Thomas Jefferson brought an informal lifestyle to the White House. He began landscaping the grounds and enlarging the residence, projects his successors continued. Andrew Jackson's frontier background and behavior set the stage for an "open house" atmosphere in which Americans came to regard the house as if it

were truly their own. How different from today, when no one may enter the White House without being thoroughly looked over and there are even barricades to protect against unwanted visitors!

During Abraham Lincoln's time, the East Room became a barracks for Union troops. This was not the first time soldiers had been in the White House. British troops had invaded Washington, D.C. during the War of 1812. After eating the dinner prepared for President Madison, who had fled the city, they set fire to the mansion. The building was gutted, although the famous Gilbert Stuart portrait of George Washington survived because Dolley Madison had it removed from its frame and taken to safety.

In the executive mansion, the tension of decision-making must blend with family life. Bachelor President James Buchanan lived comfortably in the private suite; but Benjamin Harrison's four-generation family of seven adults and four children severely stretched the accommodations. Grover Cleveland was married in the White House, and his daughter Esther was born there. Tad and Willie Lincoln staged costume dramas in the attic; Irvin and Abram Garfield had pillow fights on bicycles in the East room, and Theodore Roosevelt's son took his pony up to the second floor to visit his ailing brother. Amy Carter played in a tree house with her friends, while the Johnson sisters entertained their friends in the private quarters. And, of course, there were always the pets—such as the Bushes' dog, Millie, and the Clintons' cat, Socks. During World War I, even sheep grazed on the south lawn.

\*The author appreciates comments concerning the development of this passage by Elizabeth Fisher.

During the Truman presidency the White House was greatly in need of repair. In 1948, Congress voted millions of dollars to **renovate** it. It would have been much less costly to construct an entirely new building, but the public was opposed to abandoning the historic mansion. For although the White House is the president's residence, it belongs to the American people and is an American tradition.

Today, more than a million people tour the White House every year. Via television, millions more have

visited both the public rooms and the apartment where the First Family lives. They see a house whose rooms are handsomely furnished with **antiques** and important works of American art. They see comfortable, cheery family rooms. They see the **imposing** Oval Office, where so many important decisions are made. No matter who the president may be at the time, they see that the **essence** of the White House remains amazingly unchanged, year after year.

### THINKING IT OVER

- (1) How much has the White House changed over the years? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- (2) What are the three functions of the White House? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- (3) How did the White House get its name? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### STUDYING THE PASSAGE

- (1) Find the Main Idea: Choose one.
  - (a) What the First Families have been like.
  - (b) What the First Families did in the White House.
  - (c) The history of the White House and its significance for Americans.
  - (d) The uses of the White House.
- (2) Find the Facts: Mark each one *true* or *false*.
 

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| (a) The White House was first called the President's House.               | (a) _____ |
| (b) The White House is made of Virginia sandstone.                        | (b) _____ |
| (c) The White House was first occupied in the fall of 1800.               | (c) _____ |
| (d) Dolley Madison dried the family wash in the East Room.                | (d) _____ |
| (e) Everyone could visit the White House in Jackson's presidency.         | (e) _____ |
| (f) British troops set fire to the White House.                           | (f) _____ |
| (g) The White House was renovated during Theodore Roosevelt's presidency. | (g) _____ |
| (h) Over a million people visit the White House each year.                | (h) _____ |
- (3) Find the Order: Number the following in the order in which they appear in the passage.
 

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| (a) Since these unglamorous beginnings, presidential families have lived here.        | (a) _____ |
| (b) President James Buchanan lived comfortably in the private suite.                  | (b) _____ |
| (c) They see the imposing Oval Office.  | (c) _____ |
| (d) The presidential mansion is a combination residence, office building, and museum. | (d) _____ |
| (e) Thomas Jefferson brought an informal lifestyle to the White House.                | (e) _____ |
| (f) The East Room became a barracks.  | (f) _____ |
| (g) It would have been much less costly to construct an entirely new building.        | (g) _____ |
| (h) It stood in a sea of mud dotted with workmen's shacks and tools.                  | (h) _____ |

- (4) Go beyond the Facts: Which one of the following does the writer seem to suggest?
- (a) Presidents should not be allowed to make any change in the White House because it is a national museum.
  - (b) The White House is not as elegant as the homes of other nation's leaders.
  - (c) Americans value tradition more than money.
  - (d) The nation cannot afford to maintain such an expensive residence for the president.
- (5) Determine the Writer's Style and Technique: Which one does the writer *not* do?
- (a) Give facts and details.
  - (b) Include anecdotes and short stories.
  - (c) Use examples.
  - (d) Give an opinion.

### USING THE WORDS

- (1) Words and Their Meanings: Find the boldfaced word for these definitions.

- \_\_\_\_\_ (a) sick
- \_\_\_\_\_ (b) do over; refurbish
- \_\_\_\_\_ (c) a lasting impression
- \_\_\_\_\_ (d) something handed down from one's ancestors or the past
- \_\_\_\_\_ (e) where soldiers live
- \_\_\_\_\_ (f) very old furniture, silverware, tools, etc.; of former times
- \_\_\_\_\_ (g) that which makes something what it is; most important or basic quality of a thing
- \_\_\_\_\_ (h) grand in size, manner, looks, etc.

- (2) Write a paragraph using three of the words. Use a separate piece of paper.

### WRITING ABOUT IT

Use a separate piece of paper.

- (1) Reread the passage and make notes. Then write a booklet on the White House for visiting tourists.
- (2) Imagine you were visiting the White House and had a chance to speak to the president. What questions would you ask him? Think about the different subject areas you might question him about, such as foreign policy, the environment, health care, or other concerns you have about your country as well as questions about him and his family and the White House. Make a list of your questions, grouping them under appropriate headings.

